



Arizona State University Metro Phoenix, Arizona Waste Reduction

SCHOOL

Arizona State University, public 4-year, 70,000 students, Metro Phoenix, Arizona.

ABSTRACT

The 2010 Ditch the Dumpster program stemmed from Arizona State University's (ASU) first large-scale effort during the spring semester of 2008 residence hall move-out to divert reusable items from the landfill. This was accomplished on all four ASU campuses through a partnership with Swift Charities for Children, a non-profit organization that raises money and supplies for Arizona-based children's organizations. In 2010, an expanded core committee representing nine ASU departments and Swift Charities for Children redesigned Ditch the Dumpster efforts via better marketing, more student input, and additional convenient donation locations.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Goals

Specific goals and a well-thought out strategy enabled us to increase the amount of items donated in 2010 by 140% from 2009's endeavors and 242% from 2008's inaugural efforts. In 2008, 9,975 pounds of usable goods were donated, increasing to 14,233 pounds in 2009. The 2010 program brought in 34,199 pounds. The Spring 2010 Ditch the Dumpster efforts not only surpassed the original goal of 25,000 pounds by more than 36%, but also led to the establishment of numerous



permanent collection locations and a greater awareness about the program. Donations and supplies from the sale of the goods benefited local charities including The Boys and Girls Clubs of Metropolitan Phoenix, the ASU Polytechnic campus House of Refuge, and St. Mary's Food Bank.

Because of the success of the collection boxes used for the spring 2010 move-out, two permanent collection boxes were placed at the Hassayampa residence halls on the ASU Tempe campus in August, resulting in the collection of 3,199 pounds during the fall 2010 semester. The permanent ASU West campus collection box, which has been in place since 2008, generated another 1,510 pounds between May–December 2010. In addition, collection boxes were permanently placed on the Tempe campus on Dec. 16, 2010, which have yielded 1,195 pounds of items as of the end of December 2010. Swift Charities for Children also worked with ASU Housing staff at the ASU Polytechnic campus to collect

18,000 pounds of furniture in November. The spring 2010 Ditch the Dumpster efforts not only surpassed the original goal of 25,000 pounds by more than 36%, but also have led to the establishment of more permanent collection locations and a greater awareness about the program, which inevitably will ensure the success of future endeavors.

Immediately following the final collection efforts for the spring 2010 Ditch the Dumpster program, the core group of organizers held a feedback session in order to prepare for the 2011 move-out and beyond. Some of our ideas are as follows:

Ideas for the 2011 spring Ditch the Dumpster efforts include:

- Expansion of the attention-grabbing signage
- More student involvement
- Locating some staffed stations near trash and recycling compactors since students already take other items out there
- Increasing the use of social media for promotional purposes
- A dramatic reduction in open-top roll-off dumpsters since their presence encourages more widespread dumping of reusables
- Expansion of and/or modification of locations on all four campuses (especially Hassayampa) for even greater accessibility and convenience

Ideas for Ditch the Dumpster efforts beyond 2011 include:

- Expansion of donations to include the communities surrounding all four campuses
- Moving forward, ASU will continue to partner with Swift Charities for Children to collect as many reusable items as possible all year and make the program a bona fide tradition at ASU. Our partnership will ensure that future Ditch the Dumpster efforts result in an increase in the number of items that are diverted from the landfill and given to charity.

Accomplishments and Outcomes

The 2010 Ditch the Dumpster program successfully fulfilled its goals of diverting at least 25,000 pounds of reusables from the landfill to Swift Charities for Children, as well as building the foundation of a more sustainable move-out in years to come via outreach, branding, and marketing. In fact, not only did the 2010 move-out efforts meet our 25,000 pound goal in donations, but we exceeded it with a total of 34,199 pounds, a 140.28% increase from 2009's 14,233 pounds. While it is difficult to quantify the number of students who participated and to what level they participated, it is fair to say that hundreds of ASU students donated items to charity through our efforts and developed a greater sense of social responsibility as a result.

Swift Charities for Children's staff members and volunteers, whose efforts are a vital component of Ditch the Dumpster efforts, collect clothing, bedding, non-perishable food, and other items via area drop boxes and partnerships with the Phoenix Suns, Arizona Diamondbacks, Phoenix Coyotes, and the Forever Young Foundation in addition to ASU. Whereas numerous clothing recycling programs in Arizona are run by for-profit companies that donate only a small portion of the proceeds raised from their collections back to non-profit organizations, Swift Charities for Children donates 100% back to area non-profit groups. Recent Swift Charities for Children accomplishments include partnerships with local school districts, which have resulted in more than \$150,000 in contributions to several Valley schools and the

donation of thousands of books to Friends of the Phoenix Public Library. Swift also played an integral role in the opening of The Boys and Girls Clubs of Metropolitan Phoenix's "Swift Kids Clubhouse" and made a \$500,000 contribution to the new free standing Cardon Children's Medical Center in Mesa, Ariz. Other local groups Swift has been able to assist include but are not limited to: St. Mary's Food Bank, West Valley Child Crisis Center, YMCA, UMOM, and Foundation for Blind Children.

Challenges and Responses

Initially, a major challenge was materials handling and logistics. Students and staff were neither equipped to maintain and empty bins, nor to transport or store the sheer volume of items. We solved this by collaborating with a local non-profit organization. To greatly reduce the amount of reusable items being discarded, a group of ASU staff members partnered with Swift Charities for Children and Big Brothers Big Sisters in 2008. Swift Charities for Children, a registered 501(c)3, non-profit organization that raises money and supplies for Arizona-based children's organizations, provided semi trucks and staff to help retrieve donated items at select ASU residence halls in May of 2008. Although this was the first year a large-scale effort was attempted, 9,975 pounds of items were collected. After the 2008 move-out ended, Amanda Smith, the Vice-President of Community Relations and Marketing for Swift Charities for Children, agreed to continue to work with ASU on its future reuse endeavors. Because of Swift's stellar reputation within the community, ASU was thrilled to continue with the partnership.

In 2009, the term "Ditch the Dumpster" was coined for the move-out efforts, additional pick-up locations were added on all four ASU campuses, and a website was constructed for promotional and educational purposes. While the 2009 Ditch the Dumpster efforts yielded a 42% increase in donations over those in 2008 for a total of 14,200+ pounds of usable donations, the team lacked a clear vision and an individual to lead the Ditch the Dumpster efforts. In addition, more student involvement and key departmental support were needed as was an expanded marketing campaign and more accessible donation locations.

Immediately following the May 2009 Ditch the Dumpster program, key participants attended a meeting to review their efforts and share ideas for improving the 2010 move-out. In the fall of 2009, Rebecca Reining, who had replaced the previous program chair, began soliciting additional suggestions for the spring program. In December of 2009, she sent out a detailed agenda to the previous Ditch the Dumpster program organizers. The agenda included a 2009 program, ideas for areas of improvement, assigned tasks for each department, expectations from Swift Charities for Children, and a 2010 program timeline. Coordinated move-out discussions formally resumed in January of 2010 among internal participants, and Amanda Smith of Swift Charities for Children joined the meetings in February. Additional staff members were invited to meetings for their expertise in various areas and passion for sustainability measures and students were invited to play a more prominent role in developing the guidelines for the 2010 move-out. Smith used her experiences with the two previous ASU move-outs and dozens of other collection projects in the Valley along with feedback from other committee members to further develop a customized ASU collection program. This included securing brand new collection containers for all ASU campuses and figuring out the operational logistics for goods collected for the House of Refuge, a shelter for families in transition that is located on the Polytechnic campus.

Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint

The finely tuned 2010 Ditch the Dumpster efforts and subsequent success aligns perfectly with ASU's practices and the university's overall sustainability and service values. In fact, the 2010 efforts fit particularly well with ASU's carbon neutrality action plan (completed in September of 2009). The plan

was created because of ASU President Michael Crow's responsibility to the American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment, which he was a founding signatory of in December of 2006. Our efforts directly contributed to the near-term 2007–12 goal of "diverting 50 percent of 'dry' waste footprint through recycling, reuse, and re-purpose programs" (Arizona State University, 2010). Reuse and recycling play an integral role in the plan since recycling efforts generally are more visible to faculty, staff, students, and those visiting the campuses than other sustainability-oriented practices and procedures. The items kept out of the landfill and the information gleaned during the 2010 efforts undoubtedly will contribute to higher diversion rates in future move-outs, which are necessary if we are to attain the 2015 zero solid waste goal.

Moreover, encouraging reuse helps decrease ASU's landfill dependence, which has a disastrous impact on the environment. While some of these materials simply will fail to decompose in a landfill at all, others are actively harmful, emitting methane, carbon dioxide, and other greenhouse gases as they break down, thus adding to the global warming crisis. Discarded electronic items and other products containing materials deemed as hazardous waste release toxic chemicals into the soil and groundwater, which further contributes to the pollution of our drinking water and land.

Commentary and Reflection

We recommend partnering with a local non-profit organization (NPO) for an undertaking of this size. Not only do the items go to those in the community that need them, but the NPO also can handle all the operational aspects of materials handling, sorting, transporting. That way ASU can focus on the student engagement and marketing portions.

In 2009, donation collection events were arranged on particular days, where students could bring their items and drop them off, and we learned a lot from this method. For one thing, setting specific times for donation drop-off is not effective, as students are moving at all times of the day and night and want to do whatever is the most convenient. Also, the surrounding community knows when move-out occurs, and dumpster diving can be a problem.

In mid-April 2010, we placed secure donation bins at each of the ASU residence halls, to coincide with Earth Day. Our students gradually start moving out around this time, so it allowed us to capture a lot more items, plus it was convenient for them to be able to drop things off anytime. We designated spaces in the halls for large items (furniture, appliances, etc.), so they were secure from theft and dumpster diving as well as any inclement weather. Swift did daily bin pickups and at the large-item areas throughout the second half of April until move-out was over in mid-May. During that timeframe, we collected about 34,199 pounds, which proved that the pick-up method definitely was more successful than anything previously attempted.

In addition to the website, where additional program details can be posted, we used several different communication methods. Our committee members took turns presenting the Ditch the Dumpster information at all residence hall staff meetings during the few weeks' prior to move-out. We educated them about the program and asked for their support in assisting residents with getting donations and recycling to the right place for their particular residence hall. Getting the hall staff's buy-in was both the most important and the most challenging component, at least for us. We have such a large on-campus population that we really relied on them to help us get the word out, and we had mixed success. It is helpful to have a residential life staff that is supportive of these kinds of initiatives. In the future, we plan

to expand our communication mix to include more social media and more “guerrilla” or informal/edgy marketing.

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

ASU students and staff members, in addition to ASU’s marketing/communication systems and infrastructure, aided the committee in mitigating some of the economic challenges and resistance that sustainability measures sometimes encounter. The input offered by Campus Student Sustainability Initiatives (CSSI) students Alex Davis, Andrew Latimer, and Eric Tank was invaluable due to their understanding of the student population, their participation in several student clubs, and the fact that they had lived on campus for three full semesters. This unique insight into some of the sustainability-oriented challenges we faced, as we developed a plan for move-out, helped in identifying the following: convenient drop-off locations, effective types of communication platforms, and the types of messaging that tended to resonate with students. Despite their hectic school and club schedules, Davis, Latimer, and Tank also managed to participate in and recruit other students to assist with move-out efforts and personally monitored drop-off locations for several residence halls on the ASU Tempe campus. Leadership abilities, organizational skills, and prior experience with managing large-scale events by Rebecca Reining, Coordinator of University Housing located on the Tempe campus, allowed for more productive meetings and email communication that enabled the committee to remain on task. She was instrumental in creating an inspiring mission statement and clear vision for the committee, bringing in additional committee members with a passion for sustainability, and overseeing a good portion of the administrative logistics. She also regularly communicated with Amanda Smith of Swift Charities for Children and helped coordinate move-out efforts on the ASU West, Polytechnic, and Downtown Phoenix campus. Tim Smith, Manager of Facilities Management Residential Life Maintenance & Operations, was able to use his eleven years of working experience in various areas of residence life at four universities, as well as his Masters of Educational Counseling degree, to provide insight into student behavior and help devise an overall plan and strategy. He also conducted informational sessions for student leaders and assisted with identifying convenient drop-off locations.

In-house printing services and graphic design staff, compliments of the Global Institute of Sustainability, substantially reduced the cost of marketing materials and allowed for the timelier processing of materials. Michelle Schwartz, Project Coordinator, Global Institute of Sustainability, helped to keep the program focused and easy-to understand for participants. She provided informative content for the Ditch the Dumpster website, media releases, advertisements, and signage. Elizabeth Kather, Associate Director, Residential Life Operations helped us gain support from community directors and appropriately tailor our messaging. Due to her extensive knowledge of the ASU Polytechnic campus, Jehnifer Niklas, Program Coordinator, University Sustainability Practices, coordinated move-out collection efforts on the Polytechnic campus and assisted with the Polytechnic community garage sale. She also served as a liaison between the Ditch the Dumpster committee and the William Campus Housing staff at the Polytechnic campus, keeping them informed and securing their feedback and input on the program. Amanda Bowling, Coordinator, Student Engagement, promoted Ditch the Dumpster at various student events and offered funding, donations, and prizes as incentives for student participation via her position with Residential Student Engagement. Jacob Meltzer, as both a Community Manager and an individual with a background and interest in sustainability issues, provided valuable input to the committee. His understanding of move-out trends and student behavior helped the committee with our communication plans. And by providing access to the community assistant meetings, Meltzer enabled us to further

educate and inform hall staff, which was crucial to our success.

As Operations Director at Taylor Place at the ASU Downtown Phoenix campus, Nathaniel Fish provided insight into the unique urban nature of that community. As such, he worked directly with Swift Charities to coordinate drop-off locations and building access. Additionally, he maintained communication with Taylor Place hall staff, Student Engagement, and facilities to ensure the program's success. Dawn Ratcliffe, through her position as the ASU Tempe Campus Recycling Coordinator and prior experience organizing large sustainability-oriented events, contributed to the planning process, presentations, and operational aspects of the 2010 program. Forty-gallon bins on wheels and flatbed trucks provided by the ASU Recycling Program made it easier to retrieve items. Committee-identified indoor drop-off locations reduced the likelihood of items being stolen and made donating items easier for students.

Funding and Resources

The program was funded internally by sharing costs among the participating departments, primarily for marketing and promotion. Non-sponsoring departments supported the initiative by providing donations of advertising space in key locations such as dining facilities and the student union. Exact costs are unknown but they did not exceed \$1,000. Swift Charities for Children took the items for free and provided volunteers and staff to assist with the collection and sorting efforts at no cost to ASU. The arrangement was far more cost effective than paying \$70 a ton to have these valuable goods sent to the land fill and paying ASU employees to load items into dumpsters.

Education and Community Outreach

Although the actual collections didn't commence until April 24, 2010, committee members began speaking at community assistant meetings in early April, at which time we shared with these campus leaders the specific locations of the collections sites and the detailed list of items that were being collected. The purpose of the program was explained as well as what was needed from the community assistants and directors to make the program a success. We sent out Facebook updates, promoted Ditch the Dumpster efforts at well-attended student events, and had articles published in *What in the Hall*, University Housing's monthly electronic publication, which is sent to students. Cheat sheets were distributed to all residential hall front desks in case immediate pickups were needed and custodial management members were informed of the pickup locations and general move-out protocol.

Other University Housing employees were notified of the bin locations and Grounds Services staff members were apprised of program details as well. On April 24, rooms and meeting spaces were cordoned off for larger items, promotional signage was hung throughout many of the residence halls by hall staff, and professionally-designed Swift Charities for Children collection boxes were placed at residence halls across all four ASU campuses. On May 10, tents, tables, and banners were erected at three key collection locations on the Tempe campus and staffed by Swift Charities for Children personnel and volunteers in addition to ASU staff and students.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

Campus Sustainability History

The Global Institute of Sustainability evolved from over 30 years of environmental research conducted by the Center for Environmental Studies at Arizona State University (ASU). The Institute conducts research, education, and problem-solving related to sustainability, with a special focus on urban environments. Within the Global Institute of Sustainability there is a University Sustainability Practices group. This is a group of several individuals who are dedicated to oversee campus sustainability. We initiate and coordinate sustainability efforts of several campus community groups and stake holders. University Sustainability Practices has established four goals for campus sustainability. 1) Carbon Neutrality, 2) Zero Waste, 3) Active Engagement and 4) Principled Practice. We have established several sustainability initiatives to help the university achieve these four goals. <http://sustainability.asu.edu/>

Image credit: Courtesy Amanda Smith, Swift Charities for Children

